

# Cholesterol

**High cholesterol can affect anyone. It's a serious condition that increases the risk for heart disease, the number one killer of Americans - women and men. The higher your cholesterol, the greater your risk of heart disease.**

High cholesterol itself does not cause symptoms; so many people are unaware that their cholesterol level is too high. It is important to find out your cholesterol numbers and visit with your healthcare provider about how to reduce your risk of heart disease. The good news is that you can prevent and control high cholesterol. If you have high cholesterol, there are steps you can take to lower it and protect your heart health.

## What Is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like, waxy substance found in your bloods and in many foods. Your body needs cholesterol to work properly. Too much cholesterol can cause the buildup of plaque on the walls of the arteries which reduces the flow of blood. This leads to coronary heart disease, which leads to heart attack and angina which causes chest pain. It's also a risk factor for stroke. You get cholesterol in two ways. Your body makes some of it, and the rest comes from cholesterol in animal products that you eat, such as meats, poultry, fish, eggs, butter, cheese and whole milk. Food from plants, such as fruits, vegetables and cereals, do not have cholesterol. Some foods that don't contain animal products may contain trans fats and saturated fats, which cause your body to make more cholesterol.

There are two kinds of cholesterol that you need to know about. Low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, is known as the "bad" cholesterol. Too much LDL cholesterol can clog your arteries, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. High-density lipoprotein, or HDL, is known as the "good" cholesterol. Your body makes HDL cholesterol for your protection. It carries cholesterol away from your arteries. Studies suggest that *high levels* of HDL cholesterol reduces your risk of heart attack.

## What Do Cholesterol Numbers Mean?

Cholesterol can affect people of all ages, including children and young adults. Ask your provider for a simple blood test to check your cholesterol levels.

	Desirable Level	Borderline High Risk	High Risk
<b>Total Cholesterol</b>	Less than 200 mg/dL	200-239 mg/dL	240 mg/dL & above
<b>LDL "bad" cholesterol</b>	Less than 100 mg/dL	100-159 mg/dL	160 mg/dL & above
<b>HDL "good" cholesterol</b>	60 mg/dL or <i>higher</i>	40mg/dL & <i>below</i>	
<b>Triglycerides</b>	Less than 150 mg/dL	151-199 mg/dL	200 mg/dL & above

(more on back)

Be Active // Be Healthy

## What Affects Cholesterol Levels?

A variety of things can affect your cholesterol levels. These are areas you can make changes in to improve your health:

- **Diet** - Saturated fat and cholesterol in the food you eat make your blood cholesterol level go up. Saturated fat is the main culprit, but cholesterol in foods also matters. Reducing the amount of saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet can help to lower your blood cholesterol level.
- **Weight** - Being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease. It also can raise your cholesterol levels. A healthy weight can help lower your LDL, total cholesterol, and triglyceride levels, as well as raise your HDL.
- **Physical Activity** - Not being physically active is a risk factor for heart disease. Regular physical activity can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels. It also helps you lose weight. Aim to be physically active for 30 minutes on most, if not all days, for a total of at least 150 minutes each week.

There are also things you cannot do anything about that may affect your cholesterol levels:

- **Age and Gender** - As women and men get older, their cholesterol levels rise. Before the age of menopause, women have lower total cholesterol levels than men of the same age. After the age of menopause, women's LDL levels tend to rise.
- **Heredity** - Your genes partly determine how much cholesterol your body makes. High blood cholesterol can be in your family history.

## What Else Can You Do To Stay Heart Healthy?

There are many things you can do to help keep your cholesterol low. Everyone can lower his or her chances of developing high cholesterol, regardless of age! Here's how:

- Check your blood cholesterol regularly
- Be physically active
- Eat a healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt and sodium
- Keep a healthy weight and lose weight if you are overweight
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation
- If you use tobacco, stopping is the best thing you can do for your heart

## Resources

American Heart Association

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

Nebraska Cardiovascular Health Program

[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

[www.dhhs.ne.gov/cvh](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/cvh)

### For More Information:

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